

A Buddhist Votive Tablet.

Some years ago the late Mr. H. Vaughan Stevens discovered in Kēdah in a cave, nine feet below the floor, a number of fragmentary clay tablets stamped with inscriptions. These he forwarded to the Singapore Museum, where they now are, accompanying them with a letter explaining where he had found them.

By the courtesy of the Curator I have been enabled to submit a photograph of the largest and best preserved of these tablets to Professor Kern of Leyden, who in reply to my request was good enough to examine it and writes as follows:— “After repeated attempts I have given up the hope of deciphering the whole. The writing is Nāgari of the 10th century, approximately, and therefore the tablet is from *Northern* India. At the top I discern parts of the well known Buddhist formula :

ye dharmā hetu prbha, etc.,

The first line shows *hetuprabha* ; the second *sām hetu-tathāga-*; the third *tesām . . ca (?) yo nirodha-*; the fourth . . *vādi manah sarve*; the fifth *sams Kārā*. Further I can distinguish some letters, but without being able to make out an intelligible context. Most probably the whole tablet is filled up with the common formula of the Buddhist creed.”

The formula here referred to is clearly the one which occurs also in certain other inscriptions found in Kēdah and Province Wellesley, which will be found in Indo-Chinese Essays, Series I, Vol. 1. These were dealt with, by Professor Kern, in *Verslagen en Mededeelingen der Koninklijke Akademie van Wetenschappen, Afdeeling Letterkunde, 3de Reeks, Deel 1*. He assigns them to the period 400 A. D. These however are in a *South* Indian form of alphabet (and from such form the existing Far Eastern alphabets are in the main derived), whereas the clay tablet now dealt with points to influences from *Northern* India.

Evidently, therefore, both Northern and Southern India have contributed something towards the civilization of the Malayan regions.

I take this opportunity of pointing out, as regards the date to which this Indian influence can be traced, the following few acts:—

(1) In the 2nd century, Ptolemy gives Indian place names to several of the islands of the Archipelago, notably Java, which he calls *Iabadios* i. e. *Yava-dvipa* “the island of Java” (or the island of millet,” if that is what the name meant) as well as to certain ports on the coast of Indo-China and the Peninsula.

(2) Early in the 5th century, Fa-Hian going from Ceylon to Java, finds in the latter island “heretical Brahmans, but no Buddhism worth mentioning.” He was a Buddhist pilgrim himself and stayed five months in Java and after spending some years in India, so he may be supposed to know what he was talking about.

(3) Late in the 7th century I. Tsing, another Chinese Buddhist, found Buddhism (of the Sanskrit-using variety) flourishing in South-eastern Sumatra.

The inscriptions found in the Peninsula, though few in number and of little intrinsic interest, supply further links in this chain of evidence, and negative Mr. Hugh Clifford’s assertion (*Encyclopædia Britannica* supplement s. v. Malays) that the traces of Hindu influence do not extend to the Peninsula. They are only fainter there than in Java and Sumatra, not absent altogether.

Unquestionably Indian influence was by far the most potent of the forces which have led the Javanese and Malays to such civilization as they have attained. It has made a far deeper impression upon them than the Arab and European teaching by which it has been succeeded.

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